

STRESS RELIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS – GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT OF COPING AND RESILIENCE

Stress and depression can be unwelcome guests that ruin your holiday season and can hurt your health. We have many demands such as parties, celebrations, social gatherings, shopping, cleaning and entertaining. For some people it can be a time of sadness, self reflection, loneliness, fatigue as well as financial stress and anxiety. By being realistic, planning ahead, and seeking support you can help ward off stress and depression resulting in enjoying the holidays. Give yourself the gift of coping and resilience.

Tips to prevent holiday stress and depression:

1. **Consider your Attitude:** Check in with yourself on what you are thinking and feeling and how it effects what you do. What size is the problem and how is your reaction affecting you? Look at the possibilities, not the restrictions. Remember to maintain your sense of humor and develop positive self-talk. Your attitude can make a difference!
2. **Acknowledge your feelings.** Emotional awareness is part of resilience. Try not to worry about things out of your control. If someone close to you has recently died, there is a recent divorce, or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
3. **Reach out for Support:** A supportive family member, friend or group of friends can lighten your load. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
4. **Be realistic.** Try to accept family members and friends as they are. Be understanding and set aside grievances. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like previous years. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Be open to new traditions and ways to celebrate.
5. **Honor your finances:** Plan on sticking to your budget before you go gift and food shopping. Decide how much money you can afford to spend and don't try to buy happiness with an over abundance of gifts. As an alternative, give a homemade gift, start family gift exchanges, give the gift of your time to help a friend or relative, or donate to charity in someone's name.
6. **Plan ahead.** Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. Don't overbook yourself. Also plan for the help you will need for party set-up and clean up. It is alright to say no when you can't participate in every project or activity. See yourself as a precious bank of energy that has more deposits than withdrawals.
7. **Maintain healthy habits.** Don't let the holidays become a time for overindulgence that adds to your stress and guilt. Eat food that is nutritious. Decrease the amount of fat and sugar you eat by having smaller portions of those party foods. Enjoy the eggnog or other alcoholic beverages, but don't overdue. Remember to exercise which can help reduce stress and waist lines. Also, continue to get plenty of rest by targeting a goal of eight hours of sleep a day.
8. **Take time for yourself.** Go for a walk, listen to music, get a massage or consider meditation to clear your mind, slow your breathing and restore your inner calm and balance. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you and help you cope with the holidays.
9. **Seek professional help if you need it.** If despite your best efforts you find you are having difficulty with coping with day to day routines, are sleeping too much or too little, feel persistently sad, irritable or anxious and are plagued by physical complaints, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

Have a resilient Holiday Season!

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